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COMMUNIST CAPABILITIES IN INDOCHINA

THE PROBLEM

To estimate Communist capabilities to oppose an intervention of US armed forces in Indochina employing either:

a. Viet Minh military forces supported indirectly by Communist China; or

b. Chinese Communist and Viet Minh forces.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. The US has intervened during 1954 with ground, sea, and air forces in Indochina.

2. US forces are opposed by either: (a) Viet Minh forces alone, receiving indirect Chinese Communist aid; or (b) Chinese Communist and Viet Minh forces, receiving Soviet support generally along the lines of such support in Korea.

3. This estimate does not consider the effect on enemy capabilities of US counteraction or of enemy action not directed against Indochina.

THE ESTIMATE

I. CAPABILITIES OF VIET MINH FORCES SUPPORTED INDIRECTLY BY THE CHINESE COMMUNISTS

Viet Minh Ground Force Capabilities[1]

1. Viet Minh forces would be capable of maintaining guerrilla warfare throughout Indochina and of mounting attacks or counterattacks by regular forces up to six divisions in strength in northern Indochina. If, on the other hand, the Viet Minh make an initial decision to avoid large-scale positional warfare, they would be capable of greatly expanded guerrilla activity. Such a move would greatly increase the attritional aspects of the war on allied forces.

2. The logistic capability of the Viet Minh would be almost completely dependent upon Chinese Communist willingness and capability to make supplies available. We estimate that the present lines of communication leading from China into the Delta area of Indochina can carry the logistic support for 200,000 to 300,000 combat troops in addition to the present 290,000 combat forces. However, it is unlikely the Viet Minh combat forces would expand beyond an additional 150,000 over present strength.

3. Introduction of "volunteer" Chinese Communist forces as guerrillas or as components of Viet Minh units could increase Viet Minh capabilities up to the limit of logistic support, but it is unlikely that the pretense of non-

[1] See Table I.

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intervention could be maintained if sizeable numbers of Chinese Communist personnel were committed.

Viet Minh Air Capabilities

4. The Viet Minh do not now possess an air force.

5. In the Viet Minh-held areas there are approximately nine airfields with 4,000 to 5,000 foot runways presently unserviceable but which, within a period of a week to 10 days, could be developed to take MIG-15 operations. There are 20 airfields with runways ranging from 2,000 to 3,000 feet which, with varying degrees of improvement, would be suitable for liaison aircraft and possibly light transport activity. Many of these airfields would be severely restricted in use during wet weather due to flooding. In addition, new airfields suitable for MIG-15 operations might be constructed within 30 days. Availability of airfields would not pose a limitation to the operation of an air force of considerable size within Indochina after a week to 10 days of high priority construction activity. The Viet Minh do not now possess the capability to operate such a force. However, the Chinese Communists have the capability of training Viet Minh pilots and support personnel and of providing them with aircraft and equipment. We have no firm evidence that this capability is now being exercised.

Viet Minh Naval Capabilities

6. Viet Minh have the following naval capabilities: river mining, river ambush, and sabotage in ports and naval facilities. They also have a considerable number of native junks which could be pressed into service to meet logistic demands or to take advantage of military opportunities.

7. The Chinese Communists are capable of training Viet Minh forces in naval warfare, and providing them with river and coastal mines and mine layers.

Communist Political Warfare Capabilities

8. The Communists would have the capability of opposing US intervention by appeals to nationalism among the Indochinese population and by denouncing US intervention as an operation designed to perpetuate colonialism. These capabilities would vary not only in relation to the military progress of the war but also to the extent that the US action appeared to the Indochinese to guarantee their independence.

9. Even without specific political assurances, immediate and large-scale successes by US arms would almost certainly reduce Communist political capabilities to subvert and intimidate the Indochinese people and to use them for intelligence and logistic purposes. In addition, signs of Viet Minh defeat would probably increasingly encourage defections from the Viet Minh. If US armed successes were accompanied by political measures which guaranteed Indochinese independence, Viet Minh political warfare capabilities would be further reduced. Viet Minh nationalist appeal would be diminished, and there would probably be considerable and increasing defections from the Viet Minh. These developments would also reduce Viet Minh capabilities to conduct guerrilla and terrorist activities.

10. Communist political warfare capabilities in Indochina would remain substantial if US-allied arms did not quickly give evidence that they could bring the war to a victorious close within a short time, and if the Indochinese were not convinced that their independence was assured. We believe, moreover, that even in the event of large-scale US military successes, accompanied by a genuine conviction in Indochina that independence was assured, the hard-core Communists of the Viet Minh, probably supported from China, would for a long time retain substantial capabilities for guerrilla activity and subversion.

II. CAPABILITIES OF CHINESE COMMUNIST AND VIET MINH FORCES

Chinese Ground Force Capabilities in Indochina[2]

11. If the Chinese Communists decide to commit Korean combat-trained forces, they have

[2] See Table II.

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available 13 armies[3] which served in Korea and are now in China. Nine of these units are at present stationed in northeast China and four in east China. It is estimated that the most distant of these, in the northeast, could be redeployed to the Indochina border in 17 to 24 days and the nearest could be redeployed in 10 to 14 days. The Chinese Communists are capable of redeploying five of these armies to the border in 30 days after a decision to do so has been made. If the Chinese Communists decide not to commit Korean combat-trained forces, there are two armies in southeast China, elements of which can cross the Indochina border piecemeal in four or five days or which can be committed in a coordinated action in 10 to 12 days. Redeployment of five additional non-Korean trained armies could be accomplished in 14 to 24 days. It is possible, also, that these capabilities might be exercised prior to US intervention.

12. The capacity of lines of communication within China is not the limiting factor upon the number of Chinese Communist troops which could be moved to the Indochina border and supplied within Indochina. The chief limiting factor upon the employment of Chinese Communist forces in Indochina is the capacity of the lines of communication within Indochina. For combat operations, each army would require approximately 111 short tons per day of all classes of supplies while each artillery division would require approximately 42 short tons daily. On this basis, the maximum number of Chinese Communist units which the present capacity of lines of communication in Indochina from the China border to the Delta region would support, in addition to present Communist forces in Indochina, is approximately seven armies and two artillery divisions. Thus, the total number of Communist combat forces which could be supported over present lines of communication in Indochina is approximately 500,000 to 600,000.

13. After redeployment of Chinese Communist forces to the Indochina border, it is estimated that, during the dry season, they could reach the Hanoi-Haiphong area with leading units in seven days after crossing the border, could mount a coordinated attack with about four armies two weeks after initial units cross the border, and could build up to a total force for coordinated action of seven armies and two artillery divisions four weeks after crossing the border. Large-scale operations south of the Red River Delta area would require use of the rail line to the south, and hence are dependent upon Communist capture of Hanoi and operation of the railway from Hanoi southward. If the Communists could utilize this line to support operations, the entire force could be supported logistically to Saigon. If the rail line could not be utilized, the force which could be supported would be reduced to about three or four armies. During the rainy season troop movements will be slowed, logistic support made more difficult, and the scope and magnitude of coordinated tactical operations considerably reduced. If the Chinese Communists enter Indochina during the rainy season, they probably could not support more than four armies and two artillery divisions under large-scale offensive combat conditions, building to the total of seven armies and two artillery divisions at the next dry season. During the dry season, Communist China would be capable of employing light and medium tanks in small armored units in the Tonkin Delta.

Chinese Communist Air Capabilities in Indochina[4]

14. Operating from bases in China, the Chinese Communists have an estimated capability to intervene immediately with an air force

[3] Chinese Communist armies would probably be about 36,000 in strength, each composed of three infantry divisions, an artillery regiment, and a truck regiment of approximately 400 trucks. Each of these armies would be approximately equivalent to a US division in terms of method of employment and effectiveness. It is probable that two artillery divisions would also be employed, each consisting of a regiment of 36 75mm or 76mm howitzers or division guns, a regiment of 36 105mm, a regiment of 36 122mm, and a battalion of AAA (AW).

[4] See Table III.

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consisting of 70 jet and 40 piston fighters capable of operating against targets in northern Indochina, and a force of 10 medium piston bombers capable of operations against targets anywhere in Indochina. In addition, the Chinese Communist Air Force has about 650 jet fighters and 120 jet light bombers. Current airfield capacity in south China would permit the Chinese Communists to deploy about 250 of these jet fighters and jet light bombers immediately to augment the force operating against Indochina. Although this movement could be completed in 24 to 48 hours, the scale of operation of this force might be restricted initially by a shortage of supplies. Necessary logistic support could be provided if the Chinese Communists undertook to stockpile aviation supplies at the necessary airfields prior to US intervention. If they did not, we believe that supplies in quantities necessary to support sustained operations could be made available within a week to 10 days.

15. Additional augmentation of this force would require repair of existing airfields or construction of new airfields within range of Indochina. However, within a period of 10 to 30 days, the capacity of such airfields could be so increased that the size of this force augmentation would depend largely on air defense requirements elsewhere.

Communist Chinese Naval Capabilities[5]

16. The Chinese Communists are believed to have the following naval units in south China, mostly in the Canton area: one frigate, three gunboats, six-eight motor torpedo boats, four motor gunboats or mine sweepers, 14–16 landing ships and craft, and six–eight auxiliaries. In addition, there are numerous river and coastal patrol craft, and an estimated 1,000 motorized junks in the area south of Canton.

[5] See Table IV.

17. The Chinese Communists could undertake river and coastal mining, limited minesweeping, and the transport of supplies by sampans and junks. Also, a short-haul amphibious lift, utilizing several thousand junks and sampans now in the South China Sea coastal area, could be provided on relatively short notice.

18. Indications have been received recently of the presence of two or more submarines in the Gulf of Tonkin. Submarine patrols would present a considerable threat to naval forces operating in this area. It is possible that the USSR would provide the Chinese Communists with a limited number of submarines to be operated by Soviet crews or under the guidance of Soviet advisers.

19. While the Chinese naval air force is still in its formative phase, it has a limited capability of supporting surface combat operations by mine laying and by attacks on merchant shipping and naval vessels.

Communist Political Warfare Capabilities

20. Communist political warfare capabilities in the case of Chinese intervention would vary in relation to the course of the war. If the Communists suffered defeats, there would be numerous Viet Minh defections and a consequent weakening of the Viet Minh regime, particularly if the Indochinese were convinced that foreign rule was at an end. Moreover, the appearance in Indochina of large numbers of Chinese would probably revive the traditional Indochinese enmity for the Chinese. Communist successes, or a prolonged struggle in which neither side appeared to have prospects of victory, would enhance Communist political warfare capabilities. However, even if the Communist forces in Indochina were crushed completely, the Communists would continue to have a potential for infiltration and guerrilla warfare, particularly so long as a strong Communist regime existed in China.

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TABLE I

VIET MINH TROOP STRENGTHS
AND DISPOSITIONS

a. Strengths

Regular and Regional Forces	185,000
People's Armed Militia	106,000
	291,000

b. Dispositions

North Vietnam	69 Regular Bns 27 Regional Bns 50,000 Militia
Northern Laos	4 Regular Bns 1 Regional Regt
Central Laos	5 Regular Bns 4 Regional Bns
Central Vietnam	19 Regular Bns 6 Regional Bns 30,000 Militia
South Vietnam	10 Regular Bns 2 Regional Bns 22,000 Militia
South Laos and Cambodia	4 Regular Bns Regional Elements 4,000 Militia

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TABLE II

TROOPS STRENGTHS AND DISPOSITIONS OF CHINESE COMMUNISTS GROUND FORCES

a. Strengths

Total regulars: 2,221,000	(51 Armies of 194 Divisions which are by type: 160 Inf., 5 Armd., 3 Para., 43 Regts., 35 Bns. — 6 Cav., 20 Arty.)

b. Dispositions[1][2]

Korea	12 Armies (651,000)
Northeast China	6 Armies (272,000)
North China	5 Armies (196,000)
Northwest China	5 Armies (124,000)
East China	10 Armies (360,000)
Central China/South China	7 Armies — 3 Sep. Divs. (286,000)
Southwest China	5 Armies — 3 Sep. Divs. (181,000)
Unlocated	1 Army, Spec. Units, Trps. in Tng. (151,000)

[1] Figures do not include estimated 1,000,000 Public Security troops which are full-time, lightly-equipped troops disposed throughout China for the purpose of maintaining internal and border security.

[2] In the four southern provinces of Yunnan, Kweichow, Kwangsi, and Kwangtung firmly accepted Chinese Communist military strength is 6 armies and 2 artillery divisions. It is possible that there are an additional 5 armies and 3 separate infantry divisions in the area. There are only 2 armies confirmed (minus 1 division and an army headquarters which are in Kwangtung) located within 200 miles of the Indochina border. In addition, the 4th Artillery Division is located at Kunming. The only other troops believed to be in either Yunnan or Kwangsi Provinces within the 200 mile border zone are 2 Public Security divisions and 2 Independent Public Security regiments. Two armies currently listed as unlocated also could be in the area, but the status of these armies cannot be determined and they very possibly do not now exist.

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TABLE III

AIR ORDER OF BATTLE IN COMMUNIST CHINA

	ZONE 1[1]		ZONE 2[2]		ZONE 3[3]		TOTAL	
	T/O&E	ACTUAL	T/O&E	ACTUAL	T/O&E	ACTUAL	T/O&E	ACTUAL
CHINESE COMMUNIST AIR FORCE (CCAF)								
Fighter								
Jet	80	70	410	320	440	330	930	720
Piston	80	40	120	90	80	40	280	170
Attack	0	0	120	90	80	60	200	150
Light Bomber								
Jet	0	0	80	65	120	55	200	120
Piston	0	0	240	220	0	0	240	220
Medium Bomber	0	0	10	10	0	0	10	10
Transport	0	0	120	110	0	0	120	110
TOTAL	160	110	1,100	905	720	485	1,980	1,500
CHINESE COMMUNIST NAVAL AIR FORCE (CCNAF)								
Piston Fighter	...	...	80	40	...	...	80	40
Jet Light Bomber	...	...	40	10	...	...	40	10
Piston Light Bomber	...	...	40	30	...	...	40	30
TOTAL	...	...	160	80	...	...	160	80
SOVIET AIR FORCE, UNITS BASED IN MANCHURIA AND PORT ARTHUR-DAIREN AREA (SAF)								
Fighter								
Jet	...	...	...	...	650	560	650	560
Piston	...	...	...	...	20	20	20	20
Light Bomber (Jet)	...	...	...	...	120	70	120	70
Transport	...	...	...	...	90	90	90	90
Reconnaissance								
Jet	...	...	...	...	30	10	30	10
Piston	...	...	...	...	10	10	10	10
TOTAL	...	...	...	...	920	760	920	760

[1] Zone 1 is defined as that part of south China within MIG–15 combat range, about 400 miles of the northern periphery of Indochina.

[2] Zone 2 is designated as all of China beyond the limits of Zone 1, but exclusive of the Northeast Administrative Area and the Inner-Mongolia Autonomous Region; i.e., roughly all of China proper beyond Zone 1.

[3] Zone 3 includes the Northeast Administration Area and the Inner-Mongolia Autonomous Area.

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TABLE IV

CHINESE COMMUNIST NAVAL FORCES

Naval Vessels[1]

1 Light Cruiser
17 Frigate/Gunboats
4 Motor Gunboats
3 Old Gunboats
40–50 Motor Torpedo Boats
16 River Gunboats
45 (or more) Amphibious vessels of all kinds
11 (or more) Auxiliaries

Naval Air

Total Plane Strength[2]

TO & E	Actual
160	80
80 Piston Fighters	40
40 Jet Light Bombers	10
40 Piston Light Bombers	30

Total Naval Personnel Strength — 61,200

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[1] The light cruiser is believed to be non-operational. In addition to the vessels listed, the CCN has from 250 to 300 armed motor junks and district patrol craft. It is known that some 1,000 Chinese personnel have undergone submarine training and one ex-Soviet submarine, possibly of the "medium-range" type, is in Chinese hands in Tsingtao.

[2] See Table III.

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